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THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BIBLE

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NEW COLLEGE, LONDON; AUTHOR OF "THE THEOLOGY OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT," "HOW TO READ THE BIBLE," ETC.

NEW YORK

THOMAS WHITTAKER

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PREFACE

THIS little book consists of two lectures which were given at the Chautauqua in Matlock last summer. They are printed on the suggestion of the authorities of the Sunday School Union, in the hope that they may introduce a larger audience to the studies with which they are concerned. By the title, "The Construction of the Bible," is meant not so much the origin of its contents in the minds of the writers—a subject which opens up the great question of inspiration, its mode and method—as the putting together of the several parts of Scripture in one volume. This story of construction, therefore, is wholly literary and historical. At the same time it is necessary to be in some degree acquainted with it if we would understand the mutual relations of the various parts of what is seen to be a slowly unfolding and progressive Divine revelation.

W. F. A.

HAMPSTEAD.

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The Construction of the Bible

I. HOW THE OLD TESTAMENT WAS CONSTRUCTED

IT has often been said, and said quite truly, that the Bible is not simply a book, but that it is a library. It consists of many books of different kinds—histories, poems, speeches, letters—written in many ages that cover in all a period of about 1,000 years. The history of the Bible, or, strictly speaking, the history of the Old Testament, is the history of ancient Hebrew literature. What is this history? How was the library collected? That is the question before us.

We sometimes hear complaints of “the disintegrating process of criticism,” how it is breaking the Bible into fragments. These complaints come from taking a figure of speech too literally. In a sense it is true that the Bible has been taken to pieces; that is to say, it has been analyzed. In thought it has been divided up; but only in thought. The binding of its essential unity holds it together still;

not a page has been lost. There has been nothing analogous to the scattering of the Sibylline leaves. It is as much a mistake to imagine that the penetrating light of criticism which searches out its hidden structure is shattering that structure as it would be to imagine that the X-rays in revealing the bones of a man's hand must be tearing off the flesh.

The Bible may be compared to one of our great English cathedrals, and the historical criticism to the architect who, without disturbing a single stone, examines the pile and discovers the various styles of art and the various periods of time that it represents—seen, perhaps, in the rude Saxon foundations; the massive Norman pillars and round arches of the nave; the early English windows of the clerestory; the decorative style of the chancel; the perpendicular of the great west window; the Tudor sumptuousness of the Lady Chapel. The cathedral is one, and the various parts blend in the rich harmony of “frozen music.” Yet the sharply differing styles inform us as plainly as by a hand-writing on the wall concerning the different periods at which its several parts were built.

Now this is just what historical criticism has been doing with our Bible. The great temple stands intact; the foundations are sure, and the walls firm.

But the periods of its construction have been made apparent by means of a study of the various orders of literary architecture it represents. To change the metaphor, the strata of the rock have been examined, and the several layers and deposits of which it consists assigned to their respective ages. The geologist does not produce an earthquake when he reads the record of the rocks, and by examining the steep escarpment of the cliff detects the order of the successive strata.

What is thus brought to light is nothing new in kind. It is simply the application and verification of an ancient statement of Scripture itself. I refer to Hebrews i. 1: "God, having of old times spoken unto the fathers in the prophets, by divers portions, and in divers manners." By "*divers portions*"—this suggests that the Bible is a compilation from various sources; "*in divers manners*"—this points to the different kinds of literature that are to be found in the Bible. What is new in the study is to be traced to the greater thoroughness, the more exacting accuracy, the more scientific method of the inquiry.

We may learn to rearrange the order of the books; there is no special sanctity attached to the places in which they now stand. In point of fact, the order in which the books appear in our Bibles is

quite different from the order in which they occurred in the Bible used by the Apostles, the *Septuagint*.

Similarly, there is no special sanctity attached to the order in which the various parts of some of the books are arranged. As it has always been clear that the Bible is a collection of many books, so now it is made equally clear that some of the books of the Bible are themselves collections or compilations from various sources. This is evident, of course, in the case of the Psalter; the book itself makes mention of several authors. The same is true of the Proverbs, as the reference to the collection made by "the men of Hezekiah" (xxv. 1) shows. We shall see that it is also the case with other books.

The present inquiry will not open the question of the inspiration of the Bible. I shall take the fact for granted, without entering on the thorny path of theories concerning it. The verse quoted from the Epistle to the Hebrews is our safeguard here. It is "God" who spoke to the fathers, and not the less "God" because He spoke through the prophets in divers portions and divers manners.

In this first lecture we have to study the construction of the Old Testament. Criticism has been analyzing the volume with the result that we should

now be prepared to enter on the opposite process, the synthetic, and, starting from the earliest data, see how it was all built up. To take another form of illustration, we may regard it as a great river, the full flood of which is fed by many streams that have their sources far apart from one another among the lonely hills. In such a case it is not always easy to determine which is the main source. We usually fix on the most remote spring; but one or two springs may be about equally remote.

I

There are several very primitive streams that come down to us from the mountains of antiquity, and combine to start the river of revelation. Three in particular may be indicated, viz, the primitive ballads, the primitive traditions, the primitive laws.

We will start with the primitive ballads. Here we have the very earliest beginnings of Scripture. It is generally found to be the case that national history is first of all treasured up and handed down in the form of ballads sung by the soldiers round their camp fires at night, and repeated by parents to their children. Israel is no exception to this rule.

The earliest books of Hebrew literature of which we have any notice are two collections of ballads. One is *The Book of Jasher*, i.e. "The Book of the Upright," a volume of poems celebrating the feats of Jewish heroes. The other is *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*, a collection in which the battles of Israel with her enemies are described with a recognition of the fact that victory had been given by the God of Battles, the Lord of Hosts.

Both of these books have been lost. But they are both referred to as sources by writers of later date, and some specimens of them have been preserved. Thus both the author of Joshua and the author of Samuel acknowledged that they draw upon *The Book of Jasher* (Josh. x. 13; 2 Sam. i. 18); and the author of Numbers refers to the *Book of the Wars of the Lord* (Num. xxi. 14). The celebration of Joshua's victory over the Amalekites, and the Song of Deborah are specimens of the old Hebrew ballads—one, and perhaps both of them taken from *The Book of Jasher*. The song of the well, "Spring up, O Well, etc. (Num. xxi. 17, etc.), seems to have come from *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*.

These books of ballads, honoring the upright, ascribing victory to God, might almost be said to have constituted the Bible of the ancient Israelites.

But there is no proof that the people of the times when they were in use assigned to them the authority that was ascribed later to the Law, and later still to the whole Hebrew Scriptures.

Next, we have the primitive traditions. In their origin these must be more ancient than the ballads. In most cases, if we may reason by analogy, the old ballads are founded on traditions that come down from a still more remote age. But in the only literary form of it that has been preserved till our time, the writing of the ancient traditions is more recent than the ballads. Quite apart from contested theories of the date and origin of the Pentateuch, it is agreed on all sides that the very earliest narratives of the patriarchs in Genesis must relate to a period much more ancient than that in which the book was written.

Accordingly there have been suggestions to the effect that these narratives must be wholly unhistorical, that they are pure myths, perhaps sun-myths, like the Sanskrit and Greek myths of Dyaus and Zeus. Jacob is the sun, Rachel the moon, and the twelve patriarchs the planets.

Unfortunately for this pretty theory several obstinate facts have come to light of late that make for

the historical reality of the lives of the patriarchs. There has been too much haste with the solution of primitive history into myth in more than one direction, and recent discoveries are teaching us some caution in this matter. The spade of the excavator is coming to the rescue of many an old-world story that has been treated as a baseless legend, and helping to substantiate it with the very solid testimony of the rocks.

Thus Dr. Schliemann has dug up the remains of ancient Troy. The city, at all events, was not a myth. The golden ornaments and other treasures found by the same explorer at Mycenæ, and now to be seen in the museum at Athens, show that the people of Homer's time were considerably advanced in civilization. These discoveries entirely agree with pictures of society in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Quite lately discoveries at Rome are said to have substantiated in some measure the existence of the kings of Rome, whom Niebuhr and his followers had relegated to the realm of myth. Agamemnon seems to have been a real person; Romulus may prove to have been a real person. The negative criticism is shown to have been too hasty in Greece and at Rome.

It is the same in Palestine. The exhuming of the

brick libraries of Babylonian literature is tending to support the ancient narratives. A great discovery at *Tel-el-Amarna* in Egypt is of peculiar importance. This consists of a number of clay tablets, among which are certain reports sent in to the reigning Pharaoh from his officers in Syria, Palestine, and other regions of the East, dating from considerably earlier than the times of the exodus. The singular fact is that these reports are in the Babylonian language. Like French in our own day, Babylonian seems to have been the language of diplomacy and official correspondence in these times even for the Egyptians. From this fact two important deductions may be drawn, as Professor Sayce has shown in his work on the ancient monuments.

First, writing was known and practised in Syria and Palestine long before the time of Moses. There is no reason, therefore, to deny that the primitive traditions may have been written down before that time.

Second, the use of the Babylonian language shows that there must have been much communication between Egypt, Syria, and Palestine, on the one hand, and Babylon on the other, even in these early ages.

Now the discoveries of Mr. George Smith and other Assyriologists have brought to light a striking

resemblance between the Babylonian accounts of the Creation, the Flood, etc., and those contained in Genesis. From this it has been argued that the Bible narratives could not be older than the Captivity, when the Jews were brought into close contact with the Babylonians. But here, as Professor Sayce shows, we come upon a much earlier point of contact, the date of it being considerably more ancient than the time of Moses.

Therefore, however we are to account for the similarity—whether with reference to a common tradition, or on the hypothesis that one account is derived from the other—it is no argument for a late date for the sources of the Bible narratives.

These are some of the reasons that may incline us to believe in the antiquity of the early stories in Genesis. But now, as we are considering the composition of the Bible, the question is, How were these narratives taken over and worked into the book as we have it?

It has long been apparent that there are at least two streams of narrative in the Pentateuch. Thus we have two accounts of the Creation, two accounts of the Flood, and so on. It is customary for infidel writers to make merry with the differences between these parallel narratives. Thus, in the first descrip-

tion of the Creation, man is formed after the animals; in the second, the animals are created later to serve him as companions. In one account of the Flood all the animals go into the ark by twos and threes; in the other, this is only the case with the wild animals, the clean animals and the birds going by sevens.

Surely it is a relief to discover that we have here separate ancient records, differing, it is true, in detail, while substantially supporting the same story. In this matter we see a distinction between the simplicity of the ancient historian and the art of the modern writer. The author of our own days boils down his materials so as to fuse them into one consistent narrative. The older historian was little more than a compiler, copying out from his sources, and where they differed, setting them down side by side in their open divergence. It was not his business to reconcile them. We may thank him for his ingenuous honesty, for it enables us to get back to original sources of his history.

When we are reading Macaulay or Froude, we do not know how much is the reproduction of assured information, how much the coloring from imagination filled in by the literary artist. When we are reading the Pentateuch we can see the very ma-

terials out of which the work was built up, and compare the more ancient with the later.

Taking the two accounts of the Creation, and the two accounts of the Flood, what do we find? There is a marked difference in style between them. They may be separated by one clear distinction. One narrative in each case only uses the word "God" for the Divine Being; the other has the sacred name "Jehovah." ("The Lord" in our versions.)

An examination of the Pentateuch and Joshua (with which it really forms one work, now known as the *Hexateuch*) throughout has led to the conclusion that the second narrative—that with the name "Jehovah"—is itself formed out of two earlier narratives, one that had the sacred name "Jehovah," and one that originally only used the word "God," the Hebrew "Elohim." Accordingly the writers of the two have been called respectively the "Jehovist" and the "Elohism," and indicated briefly by the initials of these titles, J. and E. The two narratives were combined into one, which the critics call JE. This narrative may also be taken out of the Hexateuch as one continuous thread of story. It is the most attractive part of the book, rich in color, abundant in vocabulary, composed in a lively, flexible style.

The other line of narrative is that which begins with the first chapter of Genesis, and is resumed again and again in a similar style. That style is more bald and precise, and indicates a fondness for formulæ, often repeating the same phrases. It is very much the style of the lawyer. Compare, for example, Genesis ii. 4-9 with Genesis i. 26-29.

That these parallel narratives exist cannot be denied. They stare us in the face whenever we turn over the pages of the Pentateuch, and when once their specific characteristics have been pointed out, we cannot fail to detect them. They are as marked as the differences between the styles of Mr. Ruskin and Mr. Herbert Spencer. Do they in any way trouble our faith? I cannot see why they should, for they simply exemplify the idea of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that God spoke in divers parts and divers manners. That is exactly what we have here; and each narrative is inspired by God to give us its own aspect of the ancient story of the world.

Here, then, we have two streams of ancient origin—the ballads and the traditions. A third consists of the laws, which are found first in separate rivulets that afterward combine in a common stream. Three of these rivulets may be clearly discerned as among the most early sources of the Pentateuch.

The first is the table of *The Ten Commandments*, which was treasured in the ark that stood in the Holy of Holies. Great, broad, moral precepts lie at the foundation of the religion of Israel. We have the table in two versions (Exod. xx. 1-17 and Deut. v. 6-21).

The second rivulet is the *Book of the Covenant*, which we have in Exodus xx. 22 to xxiii. This is evidently very ancient, with its directions for the building of the most primitive altar of unhewn stone to which the people were to ascend with their sacrifices—very different from the later altar of Leviticus, which could only be approached by the priests. The book contains a number of directions concerning conduct; it is a sort of moral directory.

The third rivulet of the law is the *Law of Holiness*, which has been preserved and reëdited in Leviticus xvii. to xxvi. It consists mainly of directions concerning defilement and cleansing.

These three, then—the Decalogue, the Book of the Covenant, the Law of Holiness—are among the sources of the Pentateuch. They date from a period prior to the actual composition of the first five books of our Old Testament.

We read in 2 Kings xxii. how, in the reign of King Josiah, Hilkiah the priest found the "book of the

law of the Lord" in the temple. A comparison with the reformation Josiah based on this book makes it highly probable that it was our Deuteronomy.

Previous to this time Jehovah had been worshipped at many an altar among the hills of Palestine. Elijah had repaired one of these altars at Carmel, and sacrificed thereon in a great act of worship which was signally favored by Divine acceptance. But all such worship is forbidden in Deuteronomy, and part of Josiah's reformation was to put down the worship at the high places. It had become corrupt in its degenerate days; it was tending to idolatry; it led too much to a localizing of the ideas of religion, and to a loss of faith in the unity of God as well as a weakening of the sense of the unity of the nation. If the great temple at Jerusalem were the one centre of sacrificial worship, the unity of God would be better appreciated and the unity of the nation preserved.

At the same time, no doubt, less exalted, but still very human motives urged on Josiah and his priests; for more honor would come to Jerusalem and her priesthood, and more power to the king.

The discovery of Deuteronomy was the basis of a great reformation. Deuteronomy was Josiah's Bible. It has been asserted that the book had only just

been written, and written for the express purpose of supporting Josiah's reformation. It has even been asserted that Hilkiah was the author of it. In that case he must have presented himself before the king with a lie upon his lips, for he said he had found the book.

I cannot believe that a great reformation of religion sprang from a deliberate deception. The book must have been written some time before Hilkiah's discovery of it. Of its earlier history we know nothing, and conjectures on the subject are of little value. But the finding of it was an epoch in the history of the Jews.

We pass on to the days of Ezra. It is now after the captivity. A portion of the Jews have returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the city. Then Ezra comes up from Babylon, with the book of "the law of the Lord," which is read to the people assembled in an open space before the water gate (Neh. viii.). What was this book of "the law of the Lord"? It is generally agreed by students of all schools of criticism that it was the Pentateuch, and in particular, as containing what was now regarded as of most weight, the book of Leviticus.

It has been supposed by some that criticism claims to have proved that Ezra wrote the Pentateuch *de*

novo, or at all events that the five books of which it is composed—with the exception, perhaps, of Deuteronomy,—were not written until his day, or at earliest, till the period of the captivity in Babylon.

How absurd this idea is, what I have already said should make clear to every one of us. Near Banias, the Cæsarea Philippi of the New Testament, at the foot of Mount Hermon, one of the main streams of the Jordan bursts suddenly out of a cave from under festoons of maiden-hair fern, and plunges into a gorge embowered in greenery, a deep, broad, vigorous, full-fed river at its very birth. Such, according to this extraordinary notion, would be the Pentateuch in Ezra's day. Its own contents, when analyzed, contradict the idea. It has its sources far away in the past in old ballads, old traditions, old laws; and we cannot say when these originated, or how early they were written down in the first form of them.

But we now come upon an advance in ritual, apparent in Leviticus. Was this, then, the invention of Ezra and the scribes of his day? They do not give it out as such. They profess to be bringing the people their ancient law. What we have here is a *Priestly Code*—regulations concerning the priests and their rites.

Now it is very reasonable to suppose that the priests worked according to certain rules long before this. A priestly system always implies a ritual. But hitherto the ritual had been cherished and developed privately among the priests. It had not been known to the people. Ezra makes it public.

Accordingly Ezra's action has been described as a blow at the power of the priesthood. It was like the work of the Reformers of the sixteenth century in getting the Bible and the Church Service turned into the vulgar tongue. So long as these were only to be had in Latin they were the peculiar property of the clergy ; the translation of them made them books of the people. We find that Ezra was in some measure opposed by the priests. The high priest sulked, and would take no part in this popularizing of religion.

Thus we see that Ezra's great work consisted in the publication of the law.

It must be added that he or his contemporaries or immediate predecessors had edited it and brought it up to date. All the parts of the Pentateuch, which we have been tracing in their early separation, are now put into one volume, and the narrative which begins with the account of creation in Genesis i., the more bare and lawyer-like stream of history, written

in harmony with the latest edition of the Priestly code, is now worked in with the earlier parallel narrative. There is some reëditing in this process, and the final touch is given to the law.

A few of the modifications now introduced may be easily discovered. For example, in Judges the Levites are priests, and in Deuteronomy there is no distinction between priests and Levites. But in Leviticus the Levites are inferior to the priests, are simply their attendants and servants.

From Ezekiel, who had sketched out an ideal for the new form of the law, we get the key to the problem here presented to us. There had been Levite-priests at various places up and down the land in the old days. When Josiah suppressed the sacrifices at the high places the priests attached to them lost their occupation. These men were now brought up to Jerusalem with the idea that they should minister at the temple. But the temple was already supplied with priests of the house of Abiathar, who would not readily admit the newcomers to the privileges of their office. Accordingly the latter were degraded to an inferior rank, and thus the Levites sank into the position of a second order in the ministry. Their new position is defined and regulated in Leviticus.

And now what are we to say of the relation of Moses to the law?

The veneration for him cherished among the Jews of ancient times, and the repeated ascription of the law to him, suggest the reasonableness of retaining the idea so clearly set forth in the Pentateuch that Moses was the inspired founder of the religion of Israel, and his nation's great lawgiver. From Moses the stream of the law descends. There was writing earlier than his day. I do not see any reason to deny that he left his law in writing. The law is in this sense to be attached to the name of Moses. In him it originated. He is its great founder. Therefore it is emphatically "the law of Moses." But it has been developed and much enlarged.

That some such process as this had gone on has always been apparent to the reader of the Pentateuch. Moses could not have written the account of his own death and of the subsequent mourning of the people for him, nor the eulogy on his character which are found in this document (Deut. xxxiv. 7-12). It is then a question of degree.

The fuller developing and enlarging that have been brought to light of late in no way lessen the religious character of these books, or their claim to Divine inspiration. More than 1,500 years ago St.

Jerome wrote, "Whether you wish to say that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch, or that Ezra restored it, is indifferent to me."

Here, then, we have the first volume of the Jewish Scriptures complete. When the Samaritans set up their worship at Mount Gerizim, it was the Pentateuch that they adopted as their Bible. Though other books were added later in Palestine, the Samaritans had nothing to do with these additions, and therefore to this day the Pentateuch, and the Pentateuch alone, is the Samaritan Bible.

Among the Jews the Pentateuch was always esteemed the most important section of their Scriptures. It is the glory of the Pentateuch that is celebrated in the 119th Psalm. The Pentateuch is repeatedly quoted and referred to by New Testament writers with the greatest reverence. For us its law is of less interest than for the Jews; but its glowing narratives are among our choicest possessions.

II

In the New Testament we read of the Hebrew Scriptures under the name of "The law and the Prophets." Let us pass on to the second volume of

the Old Testament—the *Prophets*. This was later than the Law in being put together, and accepted by the Jews as of the canon of Scripture; but much of it was written in very early times.

The stream of prophetic teaching ran in a distinct channel apart from that of the law. The two had this in common, that they both opposed idolatry, Baal-worship, heathenism, and that they both taught, and enforced the worship of the one God Jehovah, in purity of life, as becomes the service of the Holy One. Thus they represent the essential unity of the Old Testament religion. But within the bounds of that unity they differ widely in spirit and method.

The priests were the official leaders of religion; the prophets, freer and less formal leaders. The prophets were often in opposition to the Church of their time. So they frequently appear as Nonconformists with a teaching unwelcome to the established officials. Their appeal for reformation was as distasteful to the wealthy, luxurious priest of their day, as the Methodist preaching in the eighteenth century was to the contemporary fox-hunting parson. Not seldom the prophet had occasion to denounce the corrupt conduct of the priest.

Then, on broader grounds, quite apart from per-

sonal conduct and official jealousy, the whole course of the thought and teaching of the prophets differed from that of the priests. It is prophetic teaching that "obedience is better than sacrifice," "that God will have mercy, and not sacrifice." The prophets insist on righteousness of conduct. The ceremonial is an abomination in the sight of God if it is used as an excuse or as a cloak for neglect of the primary duties.

The opening chapter of Isaiah is just a specimen of the prophetic teaching in this direction (see especially Isa. i. 10-18). No wonder it is the prophet, rather than the priest, with whom the New Testament writer is most in sympathy. St. Paul shows how the law was but an interlude added because of the hardness of the people's hearts. In the prophets are seeds of ideas that blossom to full flower in the New Testament. Here are gleams of the dawning light, faint anticipations of the rich spiritual truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The book which the Jews called "The Prophets"—the second volume of the Hebrew Bible—was divided by the rabbis into two parts, called respectively *The Former Prophets* and *The Latter Prophets*. The books of "The Former Prophets" are the histories of the kingdom, and consist of Joshua, Judges,

Samuel, and Kings; the books of "The Latter Prophets" are those that we now read under the names of the several prophets.

The first part—*The Former Prophets*—came to be reckoned in the volume of the prophets simply because the books were supposed to have been written by prophets. But we may see a further fitness in the association. The history—in the Kings especially—is written from the standpoint of the prophets; it breathes the spirit of the prophets, just as the Pentateuch, as we have it in the final form of its laws and narratives, is in sympathy with the priestly position.

The glory of the history of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel rises out of the fact that this history is represented to us in the light of the prophet's teaching—its moral character dissected, its transactions judged, its lessons deduced by men whom God had inspired to write it from the high-ground of prophecy and in the pure light of revelation.

Herein is the essential difference between "secular" and "sacred" history. It is not that God was with the Jews, but not with the English. It is that the history of the Jews was written by prophets, while the history of England has been written by

men whose highest claims are their scholarship and their literary ability. The incomparable value of this history for all ages is to be traced to its unique origin.

But these prophet-writers, while they were inspired by God with great principles of eternal truth and a peculiar faculty for discerning the moral issues at stake, were not saved the trouble of using ordinary means for collecting information concerning the bare facts of history. They frequently refer to their authorities. Thus mention is made of "The Book of the Acts of Solomon" (1 Kings xi. 41). "The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and Judah" is often appealed to. This was not our Chronicles, which is more recent than Kings; apparently it was a sort of court register. Then the narrative of Elijah and Elisha seems to have been taken from some ancient history of the prophets.

Probably the books of Kings were written soon after the destruction of Jerusalem; they carry the narrative down to that event, and stop there. Chronicles is a second version of the same story, founded on Kings, but written after Ezra's publication of the law. The writer's aim is to treat the history in view of the teaching of the law. So it may be said to be a priestly edition of the history. We do not

know who wrote it; but it would seem to have formed one work with the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

These four books were not included among the Prophets. They had their place in a third volume, to which I shall call attention a little later. The *Former Prophets* consisted simply of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings.

The *Latter Prophets* consisted of four books—viz, the three great prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and the minor prophets, the twelve being taken as a single book.

We must not suppose that the “minor prophets” are men of a secondary order, inferior to that of the three great prophets. They are so called simply because but little of the writings of any of them has been preserved, so that their books are all short. The book of Ezekiel is ten times longer than the book of Amos; but we cannot say that the priest-prophet of the exile was ten times greater than the herdsman of Tekoa.

The earliest prophets have left no writings. Perhaps they did not write. We have no hint that Elijah and Elisha published books. They were men of action, who made their influence felt by word of mouth, not always in set orations, sometimes by

means of short messages from God, that struck like thunderbolts.

Even the later prophets were led into writing by force of circumstances. They were preachers, and their productions were of the nature of sermons. Now the sermon is made to be spoken. If it is also published in a literary form, this is but a secondary business.

In some cases, apparently, we have reports of what the prophet said noted down and treasured by disciples, and these notes perhaps broken and abbreviated. This is how they come to be obscure. Amos reads very like a collection of reporter's notes taken from the prophet's spoken utterances.

Amos is the earliest of the prophets whose writings have been preserved; his date is from 760 to 746 B. C.; and Hosea is of the same period. It was the mission of these men to denounce national sin and wickedness in high places—Amos with threats of punishment, Hosea with gracious invitations to repentance.

Isaiah follows in the second half of the century, and with him are contemporary Micah and Nahum. In the great book of Isaiah we have a collection of many prophetic utterances extending over a number of years. We do not know whether the prophet

edited and published them himself, or whether this was done by his disciples after his death.

It is now agreed among most students of the subject that the latter part of the book of Isaiah, from the fortieth chapter onward, as well as some earlier portions, were composed by some prophet or prophets during the captivity. The whole situation is changed. Isaiah is full of the life of his times, and he writes in the first instance for his contemporaries; but the later part of the book makes no claim to be the work of Isaiah. It is written from the standpoint of the captivity, to comfort the exiles in their present distress, and cheer them with the prospect of deliverance. This great utterance is equally valuable, equally true, equally Divine, though it is to be dated from the time of the captivity.

When we come to the age of Jeremiah, we have another instance of a collection of the separate utterances of a prophet in one volume. Here, however, we learn that these utterances were deliberately dictated and written out by the express wish of the speaker in order that they might be preserved.

Nearly contemporary with Jeremiah are the obscure prophets, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Obadiah. This is at the end of the 7th century B.C. Then

comes the captivity, the greatest break in the history of the Jews. Besides the author of the last chapters of Isaiah, Ezekiel belongs to this period. He is of the captive priests carried off after one of the earlier invasions before the destruction of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel is a literary prophet. There is now no possibility of influencing the nation by speech, as the people are scattered, and they have no centre. If they are to be addressed, it must be by the pen. This is the first peculiarity of Ezekiel.

Another is not less remarkable. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel is a priest as well as a prophet, and to him the priesthood means much more than it signifies to his great contemporary. He is keenly interested in the Temple ritual, and he draws an elaborate picture of its future restoration.

Now this is very remarkable. Formerly the priests were jealous of the prophets, and the prophets scorned the priests. That was the old condition. It is to exist no longer. From Ezekiel onward the prophets are interested in the Temple and its ministry. But then it is a new and purified priesthood that they encourage.

After the return from the captivity there was a great increase of attention to ritual on the part of the Jews; but this ritual was no longer merely a

formal procedure—it was the expression of the re-awakening of religious life among the people. We may think it unfortunate that the revival took this turn. But the failure of the older prophecy to lay hold of the nation had proved that men and women were not ripe for the more spiritual type of religion. This was never attained until Jesus Christ appeared and made it possible for His followers.

At the time we are now considering, the religion aided by symbolism that the priests administered was more within the reach of the Jews. It was a decline from the ideal of such prophets as Isaiah and Jeremiah; but that ideal had never been reached by the people. The religion of the more ritualistic form was within their reach. Therefore it seemed to suit the awakening spirit of devotion.

The three prophets of the return are Haggai, who encouraged Zerubbabel in building the Temple, and Zechariah and Malachi a hundred years later. By the time of the last-named prophet the zeal of the great revival has died down. But the priestly idea of religion is not abandoned. In a tone very different from that of Isaiah, Malachi rebukes the Jews for not paying their tithes to support the priests and the Temple services.

We cannot tell when all these books of the

prophets were put together. It must have been subsequent to the publishing of the law by Ezra, for some of them were not even written then. Probably it was some three or four hundred years before Christ. Thus at length we have the two volumes which the Jews read in their synagogue services as *The Law* and *The Prophets*.

III

In the last place we have to consider the formation of a third volume, containing the remaining books of the Old Testament. Among the rabbis this went by the name of "the Writings." In Greek it is called the *Hagiographa*, or the "Sacred Writings." It consists in the main of two classes of literature—poetry and philosophy.

In Hebrew poetry the first place must be given to the Book of Psalms, to many of us the most precious garland of the choicest flowers of the older revelation. It was the hymn-book of the ancient Jewish Church, and it affords the most perfect expression for the devotion of the Christian Church of all denominations in all ages, speaking from the heart to the heart in the truest language of the heart. Here deep calleth unto deep. They who

know most by experience of the deep things of God are most warm in their appreciations of the Hebrew psalter.

This book is popularly designated "The Psalms of David," but evidently it is a collection of lyrics from many writers living in various ages. By the Jews it was divided into five books. Various characteristic distinctions among the several groups of psalms may be observed. Thus we have psalms that make mention of the name "Jehovah," and others that simply use the word "God" (Elohim).

Possibly the composition of these psalms ranged over several centuries. No one can say exactly when the earliest of them was written. There are some who would date the latest in the time of the Maccabees. This would be very interesting if it could be proved, for it would show that the centuries between the time usually assigned to the close of the Old Testament and New Testament times were by no means barren of inspiration, were not, as they have been described, centuries of silence. It would remove the strange anomaly of the supposed fact that the most glorious period in the history of the Jews, which was also the time of the deepest and most widespread devotion, was barren of all inspired prophecy.

Still we cannot understand the coming of the Spirit. Frequently the prophet of God has given utterance to his most luminous thoughts in the darkest seasons of national and religious depression. No sure proof has been furnished of the existence of what are called "Maccabean Psalms," and it is difficult to see how compositions of so late a date could have appeared in the Septuagint version of the Psalms.

Hebrew philosophy is very different from Greek philosophy. The Semitic mind takes but little interest in abstract metaphysics. With the Jew, philosophy is practical wisdom. This finds its highest expression in the Book of Proverbs. Clustering round the name of the great king Solomon are the wise sayings of many sages of various ages. Here we have the root and spring of a whole order of literature, known as the "Wisdom" literature.

A great poem—the grandest product of Hebrew genius—the Book of Job, is classed with this literature. We find it in the third volume of the Jews' Bible—among the *Sacred Writings*. The poem is occupied with the most profound problem of providence, with the dark mystery of evil. Yet it does not face its theme in the cool temper of the philoso-

pher. Illumined with imagination, fired with passion, it throws its arguments into the form of a vigorous, life-like dialogue, using irony and even sarcasm as its weapons of controversy. The whole appears as a sort of drama. The date of the poem cannot be fixed exactly. Probably it comes somewhere near the time of the Babylonian captivity.

Five books of this last volume of the Hebrew Bible were known among the Jews as the Five *Megilloth*, *i. e.* the "Five Rolls." These were honored by being read at certain festivals. They are the Song of Songs for the Passover, Ruth for the Pentecost, Lamentations for the ninth of the month *Ab* (the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem), Ecclesiastes for the Tabernacles, and Esther for the Purim. They were written at widely separated periods of time—the Song of Songs probably in the early days of the ten kingdoms, Esther as one of the very latest books of the Old Testament.

We only meet with the Book of Daniel late in the history of the construction of the Hebrew Bible. It was not placed by the Jews among the prophets; it stands in the third and final volume.

It is not easy to say when this volume was put together. The prologue to Ecclesiasticus was written in the year 132 B. C., and the author of it tells us

that his grandfather had given himself to the study of "the law and the prophets and the other books of the fathers." His grandfather—the statement brings us back to about 200 B. C. This vague expression, however, will not be enough to assure us that all the books of our Old Testament were included.

But by the end of the second century, at latest, the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures was complete, though some questions were subsequently raised concerning one or two of the books. Doubts were still felt about the authority of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs; even after the time of Christ there were differences of opinion among the Jews as to the right of Esther to be in the canon. Still, these books were all retained, and the Old Testament, now completed, came to be universally accepted among the Jews in its entirety as Holy Scripture, though a preëminent rank was still and always assigned to the first volume, that of the Law.

This Bible of the Jews was translated into Greek in Egypt, most, if not all of it before the time of Christ.

Meanwhile a number of later Jewish writings had appeared. In Egypt these, too, were translated into Greek, and incorporated with the older Scriptures.

They are known to us as the "Apocrypha." The value of them is very unequal. The Book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus are treasures of rich and lofty teaching. The story of Bel and the Dragon is a mere childish tale. Yet these books, being in the Greek Old Testament, were all taken by the Christian fathers as Scriptures.

When Jerome translated the Old Testament into Latin, that it might be understood by the people who spoke Latin, he included these writings. That is how they appear in the Latin Bible, the only Bible of all western Christendom for a thousand years, the Bible of the Roman Catholics of our own age. Thence they passed into the earlier English Bibles. The Council of Trent pronounced them to be inspired Scriptures.

The Reformers, in refusing to admit them as authoritative in matters of doctrine, and so taking up this position of difference from the Catholic Church, agreed with the great body of the Jews who never received them as Scripture. In so doing they also followed the lead of the New Testament writers. Some of these writers knew part, at least, of the Apocrypha. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews shows that he was acquainted with the

Book of Wisdom. But none of them cite any part of the Apocrypha as Scripture.

Other Jewish books, which were not even included in the Apocrypha—such as the *Book of Enoch* and the *Assumption of Moses*—are quoted in the New Testament, just as even heathen poets are quoted by St. Paul. But they are not treated as Scripture. The Bible of the Apostles is just our Old Testament.

We see, then, that this book entirely agrees with what is said of it in the Epistle to the Hebrews. It was written by many hands, during a long period of time, in various styles. We may be thankful that the most recent research has brought these points out with a new clearness, for in so doing it has added much to the interest of the book.

And now, in conclusion, I would wish to commend to you the careful study of the Old Testament. There is a tendency in some quarters to undervalue and neglect it. There are those who regard it as wholly superseded by the New Testament. That was not the teaching of Christ and His apostles. It is true we must be careful not to fall into the mistake of setting it on the same plane with the fuller revelation contained in the New Testament. But

read with the right perspective, it is full of interest and weighty with great teaching.

First, it shows us the beginnings of revelation, and helps us to trace the Divine light from dawn to day.

Second, its incomparable narratives, the delight of our childhood, are alive with lessons for all time.

Third, in the prophets especially we have the loftiest principles of public righteousness expounded and enforced.

In New Testament times there were no politics, because the Roman Empire had suppressed and extinguished all political freedom. The only political duty possible to the subject of a Roman province was to "submit to the powers that be."

It was otherwise in the days of the Hebrew kingdoms. The prophets were the teachers of the two nations in public as well as private ethics, and therefore it is to the prophets that we can go for instruction in the righteousness that exalteth a nation. It can scarcely be affirmed that their trenchant utterances concerning the true principles of public life are not needed in Christendom to-day.

Fourth, in the Psalter we have the heart-breathings of devotion for all ages. Can we afford to dispense with the 23d Psalm—that loveliest Divine

pastoral? or the 51st—the cry of the penitent, the natural accompaniment of the parable of the Prodigal Son? or the 90th—the noblest funeral dirge? or the 91st—leading us to the secret place of the Most High? or many a hymn of right jubilant praise that lifts us to heaven as with the wing and song of a lark?

But, above all, we have our Lord's advice to search the Scriptures—and by “the Scriptures,” of course, He meant simply the Old Testament—because they testify of Him. Here we discover the foundation of the great Christ-idea, the true preparation for the coming of Him who, as concerns the past, is “the root and offspring of David,” while, as touching the future, He is “the bright and morning Star.”

II. HOW THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS CONSTRUCTED

THE only Bible that the Christians of New Testament times possessed was the Old Testament. Their enemies were champions of the Law. The Christians delighted to read in the Prophets, where they found foreshadowings of Christ, His sufferings and His victory, and at their meetings for worship they would read out of the roll of this second volume of the Jewish Scriptures.

The several books of the New Testament were written at various times; there was no printing press to multiply copies; and at first they must have been confined within very narrow circles of readers. There is no indication that the scattered groups of readers of the different books had the remotest idea that these works were destined to be collected together and added to the old Jewish Bible.

I

Probably the first book of the New Testament was the Epistle of St. James—an epistle addressed to Jewish Christians. This could not have been

written during the course of the great controversy between the rigorous Jewish Christians, who claimed St. James as their leader, and the disciples of St. Paul, for it gives no hint of the occurrence of that earthquake in the primitive Church. There are those who would set it quite late. But it is exceedingly primitive in character. Its theology is of the elementary kind which might be expected to precede the deep thinking of St. Paul. It refers to the church as a synagogue—a very primitive title, implying, apparently, that some synagogue of Jews had gone over in a body to Christianity.

So little of the full Christian doctrine is there in the epistle, that one of the latest writers on it—Spitta—has tried to show that it is in reality a Jewish book, which the Christians had simply adopted, inserting the name of Christ in two places. Against this daring theory there stands one peculiarly strong objection. St. James' epistle, more than any other book of the New Testament, except the gospels, teems with echoes and reminiscences of the teachings of Jesus Christ. It does not say anything about Him personally, only mentioning His name on two occasions; but it is full of His thoughts.

James was slow to believe in his wonderful Brother. Before the resurrection he withheld his

adhesion to the new movement. Then the risen Christ appeared to him—we know not where, nor under what circumstances—and James became a professed disciple, soon to be raised to the vacant seat of presidency among the Christians at Jerusalem.

His epistle is charmingly written in very good Greek. Its sound, practical lessons stand for all time. We shall be slow to agree with Luther in calling it an “epistle of straw.” If it does not contain much gospel meat, the salt of its wholesome teaching on conduct is a much-needed article of diet.

St. Paul’s epistles range themselves in four periods, three of which are comprised in about ten years, from A. D. 53 to A. D. 63.

The first period gives us the two Epistles to the Thessalonians—written about the year 53. Like St. James’ Epistle, they come before the great controversy with Judaizing Christians. The only opponents St. Paul has to contend with as yet are unbelieving Jews. The epistles are addressed to a Church consisting chiefly of working people—weavers, fishermen, dock laborers.

We should not look for any profound speculations here; and we do not find them. There is some

trouble about deaths in the brotherhood, these simple people having assumed that Christians were not to die at all—even the natural death of the body. Living in daily expectation of the return of their Lord, they were sadly perplexed that any of their number should have been taken away before that glorious event. Would these departed souls miss the joy of the Advent? St. Paul reassures the Church in its anxiety on this account. Certainly they will not be precluded from meeting the Lord at His coming. On the contrary, the dead in Christ shall have the privilege of being the first to greet Him.

What a very primitive condition of the Church we have here? The question, if ever it arose at all, could only have come up when the very first occurrence of death startled the happy community out of their sanguine dream.

The eager expectation of the coming of the Lord had another unfortunate effect. Some people ceased to work. Was not the end of all things at hand? Then why build houses nobody would have occasion to inhabit? Why weave garments nobody would need to wear? This dangerous tendency must be severely rebuked. "If any will not work," says the apostle very practically, "neither let him eat."

Religious enthusiasm is not to be an excuse for idly poaching on the generosity of our fellow-Christians.

An interval of some four or five years follows the writing of these two letters to the Thessalonians—years big with events: first, in the extension of St. Paul's evangelistic work; second, in the breaking out of the controversy with the Judaizers.

The epistles of the second group were all written within a twelvemonth—from A.D. 57 to A.D. 58. They are four in number—the two to the Corinthians, the Epistle to the Galatians, and that to the Romans. These four productions of the apostle to the Gentiles are his most vigorous and significant works. They bring us into close contact with the great soul of the writer, and they set before us his chief ideas—those that constitute what he calls "*my gospel*"—*i.e.* the gospel he had received not from man, but directly from God—the gospel of free grace through faith for every human being, irrespective of nation, race, or privilege. The attacks of opponents had called for this very pronounced statement.

Theological definiteness is generally the outcome of controversy. This is some compensation for the pain and ill-feeling that controversy is apt to engender. Doctrines that were previously quite vague

attain to clearness of outline and crispness of statement in the sharp antithesis of debate.

The debate which runs through St. Paul's four great epistles is one that touches the very life of Christianity. Was it necessary to become a Jew in order to be a Christian? Must the convert from the Gentile world be circumcised and keep the law as a Jew, if he is to be received into the Church? To say "Yes" in response to questions such as these was to make Christianity but a branch of Judaism—a narrow, national, temporal creed.

It was worse; it was to leave the Jew in bondage to the law, and to introduce the Gentile to that irksome yoke—*i.e.*, in effect it was to destroy the gospel, and offer Christ and the law instead of Christ and the gospel. But Christ received together with the law would be only a Jewish Messiah, not the Saviour of the world—not really a Saviour at all, but only a second Moses, a Judge and Ruler of His people.

In opposition to this narrowing, stifling doctrine, St. Paul insisted on the glorious freedom of the grace of God and the simple condition of faith for the reception of that grace. It was a desperate effort. He had to contend single-handed against a host of bigots, the twelve apostles giving him no

material assistance, perhaps not wholly sympathizing with his daring innovations.

The two epistles which set forth the apostle's teaching on this question most clearly and forcibly are those to the Galatians and the Romans. They do so in very different styles and tempers. The Galatians, as Professor Ramsay has recently demonstrated, were the apostle's old converts in the cities of his first missionary journey—Antioch, Iconium, Derbe, and Lystra. These had been his most devoted disciples. But the Judaizers had crept in and wrought havoc in the flock. The Churches had been ensnared—they must have been “bewitched,” says the apostle—so that they had entangled themselves with Jewish practices, Gentiles as they were, and had come to show coldness toward their spiritual father, St. Paul.

It was like the case of the converts of an evangelical mission among the heathen falling into the hands of the Jesuits and going over to Roman Catholicism. Naturally the apostle was indignant. His letter, from beginning to end, is one of warm expostulation.

At Rome the circumstances were very different. St. Paul was no longer writing to his own converts when addressing his letter to the metropolis of

the empire; the Church had been founded by others. The apostle approaches the Roman Christians with the courtesy and considerateness of a gentleman addressing strangers. He is anxious to explain his own gospel, rather than to controvert opponents; or, if he has any opponents in view, they are Jews, not Judaizing Christians. Yet his doctrine is the same—free grace on God's side, faith on the part of men.

In writing to the Corinthians, while these controversies and the doctrines they touch are always in mind, the apostle is more immediately concerned with other questions. He has heard from slaves of the household of a certain Chloe that there are grave disorders among his converts at Corinth—miserable party divisions, a case of gross immorality, Christians going to law with their brother Christians in the heathen courts, ill-regulated Church meetings, abuses in the love-feast where well-to-do people bring their private stores of food, eat greedily, and even become intoxicated, while their poorer brethren are left neglected.

We could hardly believe such disgraceful things of one of the primitive Churches, if we had not the evidence in the apostle's own words. The Christians were called "saints"; but evidently such a

Church as that at Corinth was disgracefully lax. We may hope that, with all our faults, we have advanced beyond the condition of partial emergence from heathenism, in which this very elementary community was existing when St. Paul directed his two epistles to it. We should remember that this was a missionary Church surrounded by the vices of a most corrupt pagan civilization.

Still, the lofty ideals of Christian ethics had been set before the Corinthians; no laxity could be condoned. Point after point the apostle takes up and presses home with strenuous expostulations.

Such a letter was little expected. The Corinthians had written to St. Paul seeking his advice on certain questions of casuistry which might be compared with the questions in our Augustine's correspondence with Gregory the Great, recorded by Bede—on the advisability or otherwise of marriage, on eating food that had been presented to idols, etc. All these questions the apostle postpones till he has disposed of the infinitely graver matters made known to him by the members of Chloe's household. At length he comes to the correspondence, answering the questions seriatim, with a breadth of treatment combined with a considerateness for people of

weaker consciences or narrower judgments that is a model for all similar occasions.

The second epistle has less pressing matter to deal with. It is written a few months later than the first, after the apostle has left Ephesus, and while he is in Macedonia on his way round to Greece, collecting the contributions for the poor of the Jerusalem Church.

In the meantime the riot at Ephesus has taken place. The apostle has suffered ; his work has been broken up. The Corinthians also have been plunged into grief. Thus that letter comes to be one for troubled souls, touching the deepest things of experience, and pointing to the highest consolations of God. The apostle here recounts his own experience—his terrible hardships, his hair-breadth escapes, his joy in all suffering endured for the sake of his Lord.

The third group of St. Paul's epistles dates from the period of his imprisonment at Rome. These epistles seem to have been written a little after the year 62. They also are four—viz, those to the Philippians, the Ephesians, the Colossians, and Philemon. They have a common character which marks them off from the preceding group.

The storm-tossed vessel is now in quiet waters.

The warrior is at rest. The conflict is over. Peace and joy reign in the heart of the apostle. Yet he is a prisoner at Rome, about to appear before Nero, and doubtful as to the issue of his trial. Inactivity is forced upon him. But while an unchastened soul would fret at the restraints, St. Paul has found that——

“Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage.”

He has inward freedom because he has learned, in whatsoever state he is, to be independent of circumstances; and the secret of this attainment is that he can do all things through the Divine Strengtheners.

Christ is the centre of each of these epistles—that to the Philippians revealing the joy and strength of personal union with Christ; that to the Ephesians the blessedness of the Church's connection with Christ; that to the Colossians the supremacy of Christ over all creation. The graceful little note to Philemon is a sort of appendix to the Colossian letter, breathing the very essence of the Christ-spirit in its request for the pardon of an escaped slave.

The fourth and last group consists of three epistles addressed to individual men, two to Timothy

and one to Titus. They are known as the "Pastoral Epistles," because they deal with the duties of Christian ministers. These have been questioned more than any other of the Pauline epistles, chiefly on three grounds. "

First, that it is impossible to find a place in the "Acts" narrative where the journeys and associations to which they refer can be located.

Second, that the language differs from the apostle's style and vocabulary in his undoubted epistles.

Third, that the Church government and the heresies here referred to point to a later age.

The answer suggested to the first objection is found in the theory of acquittal in the trial before Nero, followed by a period of renewed missionary activity, which leads to a second imprisonment. According to Roman law St. Paul ought to have been acquitted at his first trial—Agrippa saw this (Acts xxvi. 32). Nero had not yet entered on his wild career of blood, and he had no grudge against the Christians.

The answer given to the second objection is that the apostle's reading at Rome would have introduced him to a wider knowledge of the Greek language.

The answer offered to the third is that the de-

velopment of the Church shown in these epistles is not at all what we see in the second century. But the whole subject is one for careful investigation among the more difficult problems of New Testament history.

In touching on these four groups of St. Paul's epistles, I have not mentioned the Epistle to the Hebrews. You may take it as established that this epistle was not written by St. Paul. The title in our Bible is a late addition. The epistle itself makes no claim to be St. Paul's. It is only assigned to the apostle by a Church tradition, and other Church traditions assign it to other writers.

In the present day some critics attribute it to Luke, some to Barnabas, some to Apollos, some to an unknown author. It seems impossible to settle the question with the scanty information that is all we possess; but the literary style and the treatment of the Old Testament are so very different from St. Paul's that we may be sure, whoever wrote the epistle, the great apostle was not the author of it.

Nevertheless, it is a glorious, inspired work. The immediate aim of it was to reassure wavering Jewish Christians, who were in danger of losing heart and even of losing faith, because, in being expelled from

the synagogue, they had lost the privileges cherished by their fathers.

The writer shows that these much-prized privileges were but shadows of good things to come; while in the gospel those good things themselves are to be obtained, so that the Christian has in a better and more effectual way all that the Jews claimed to possess.

The two epistles ascribed to St. Peter come a little later. The first is rich in the very juice and marrow of Christian truth. The authorship of the second has been more doubted than that of any other book of the New Testament. This epistle has absorbed and reproduced, verse by verse, almost the whole of the little epistle of Jude.

The three epistles of John come last of all—touching expressions of the aged apostle's deepest convictions and warmest feelings at the very end of his long life, written toward the close of the first century.

These epistles of James, Paul, Peter, Jude and John, together with the Epistle to the Hebrews, are the works of at least six inspired writers. At first there was no attempt to bring them together into one volume. They were sent to separate Churches or to private persons. The writers betray no notion

that they are ever to be published for the benefit of the whole world.

No doubt the authors would have been amazed if they had foreseen the minute study to which their fugitive writings were destined to be subjected by many minds in many ages. But God was using these writers not merely for the sake of the temporary purposes they had in view. Unknown to themselves their inspired works were fitted to serve in later days for the instruction in Christian truth of nations concerning the very existence of which they could have had no conception.

“This is the Lord’s doing ; it is marvellous in our eyes.”

II

Another group of writings next invites our attention. The four gospels were all written later than most of the epistles. Yet they rightly take the first place in our New Testament. They narrate events that precede the epistles ; and in those events they give the key to all that follows, showing the root and foundation of the new Christian life, the development of which is illustrated in the epistles.

The topic to which they are devoted—the life and

teaching of Jesus Christ—marks them out as of paramount importance. Here we are at the citadel of the faith. “Matthew’s gospel,” says Renan, “is the most important book that has ever been written.” When we consider the vast extent of the world’s library, and the priceless value of the masterpieces of the literature of all nations in all ages, it seems a bold thing to make such an assertion of this one little tract. And yet, what book can be put before one of the gospels? We may not all of us select Matthew in particular for the crowning pinnacle of glory; but it is safe to say that, taken together, our gospels are the four golden spires of the great temple of literature.

It is not the literary charm of these books that gives them their preëminence, although their grand simplicity, their unconscious directness, their singular skill in saying much with few words, point out the evangelists as men of no mean order, even when judged at the bar of common prose authorship. But the supreme glory of the gospels comes from their subject. Never before had writers such a theme.

Let us now inquire how these four gospels were written. They naturally group themselves as three and one. The first three gospels have much in common, and they have been named the *Synoptics*, from

the idea that they take a common view of their subject. St. John's gospel is a later work, standing by itself, covering for the most part different ground from that of the others, and in a measure supplementing them.

Let us begin with the synoptics—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. There is a striking agreement among them, broken now and again by no less striking differences.

A careful comparison between them leads to the conclusion that Mark was written earliest, and constituted the basis of both Matthew and Luke. Frequently these two gospels follow Mark word for word. When this is not the case, they still absorb so much between them that there are only two or three incidents in the second gospel that are not to be found either in the first or in the third, if not in both.

We must therefore take Mark first. Fortunately, it is the gospel concerning which we have the most full and exact information. From Papias and Irenæus, who lived in the middle and the latter half of the second century, we learn that Mark was a disciple of Peter, who wrote down the contents of his master's preaching.

Papias says that Mark was careful to be accurate

in his reports, but that he wrote "not in order." It is difficult to determine exactly what this last phrase means. But as we have groups of incidents of a similar character in the gospel, it may be that they are not altogether arranged in chronological order.

For example, Mark gives us right off a series of incidents in which the scribes and Pharisees take offence at the conduct of Jesus—His forgiving sin, His permitting His disciples to abandon the practice of fasting, His eating with publicans and sinners, His supposed Sabbath-breaking. It is hardly probable that all these things come sharply, one upon another, at one point in our Lord's life. It is much more likely that they are grouped together in order that by seeing them all at once we may the better understand why Jesus was rejected and persecuted.

Because Mark's gospel is rather shorter than its companions, it has been hastily assumed that it is in part an abbreviation of them. This is a complete mistake, as a little careful comparison of the gospels in their narration of the same incident will make apparent.

Mark is short simply because of his omissions. He gives no account of the birth and infancy of Jesus; he does not record lengthy discourses; where the other evangelists have a string of parables, Mark

contents himself with one or two specimens. His gospel is devoted to events in the life of Jesus, rather than to the teachings which take so large a place in the other gospels. But in narrating these events Mark is more full of detail and more richly colored than the other synoptics.

We may go to this gospel, then, for the primitive accounts of the deeds of Jesus, and find them the most complete accounts.

It is very satisfactory to find this to be the case with a work so highly authenticated as the second gospel. A concurrence of very ancient testimony points to it as the work of a companion of St. Peter, and as virtually that apostle's preaching.

Can we go further back in our search for primitive sources? We have no occasion to do so in the case of the second gospel, reposing as it is on the testimony of a leading apostle. But there is much matter common to Matthew and Luke that is not found in Mark. Whence did it come? That it is derived from a common source seems to be proved by the remarkable resemblances between these two gospels, especially in their reports of the sayings of Christ; for it is improbable that either of them borrowed from the other.

Their *differences* do not allow of such borrowing.

For example, the two accounts of the infancy of Jesus, of the sermon on the mount, and of the resurrection, are so different that we must suppose they were independent of one another. It is not that these accounts do not admit of reconciliation. The need of some explanation before they can be reconciled is a proof that neither of them is dependent on the other.

It has been suggested that there was a very primitive gospel, or perhaps not a full-dress gospel, but a collection of notes on the life of Christ, written out for the use of traveling evangelists, which contained those teachings of Christ that are common to Matthew and Luke.

The existence of such a document might account for the perplexing fact that very early church-writers—Clement, of Rome, for example, who wrote an Epistle to the Corinthians about the year 90, and the author of *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, whose date is about the same time—give sayings of Jesus differently worded from similar utterances reported in our gospels. We have no evidence that any authoritative document of this nature was issued by the apostles. But we know that there were certain early attempts to write the story of Jesus Christ; St. Luke tells us in the preface to his gospel

that there had been many such before he wrote his own account.

The suggestion that what is common to the gospels may be accounted for by the existence of a common tradition will not meet the requirements of the case—the resemblances are too close.

Here the writer Papias, to whom I have referred for his account of Mark, again comes to our aid. These are his words: "So, then, Matthew composed the oracles in the Hebrew languages, and each one interpreted them as he was able."

You will notice two remarkable points in this statement of Papias concerning St. Matthew and his work.

First, he calls it a collection of "Oracles"; *logia* is the Greek term, a word that was used for the utterances of heathen prophecy, as in the "Delphic Oracle." It would seem to indicate inspired, authoritative sayings. Now we find the closest agreement between the gospels in their reports of the sayings of Christ. It seems likely that care would be taken to treasure up these sayings in writing, even during the early period when the events of the life of Jesus were still fresh in the memory of many, and could be trusted for a time to tradition.

Still, it would appear that in this most primitive

work of his, Matthew did not confine himself to recording detached oracular utterances. There must have been some connecting narrative, part of which was carried over to the other synoptic gospels.

The second point of interest is the clear statement that Matthew wrote his book "in the Hebrew language." This is supported by the universal testimony of early church-writers. Several state distinctly that Matthew wrote in Hebrew; none say anything to the contrary.

But our Matthew is in Greek; and plainly it is not even a translation from a Hebrew original. Its style and many of its phrases show that it must have been composed originally in Greek. If, then, Papias and the other Fathers who refer to the subject are correct, Matthew must have composed some earlier work that has been lost, although it was used in the formation of our gospels.

A curious fact here comes in to confirm the testimony of the Fathers. Some of the variations between the synoptics can be explained on the hypothesis that the writers drew from a common source, found in a language which was not the same as that in which they were writing.

For example, all three use different words for "bed" in the incident of the paralytic who was let

down through the roof of the house in which Jesus was teaching. There is no reason for the variations if a common Greek source had been followed. But if the evangelists were using a Hebrew document, it would be quite natural for them to render the word differently, according to taste or habit, seeing that two or three equivalent Greek words lay ready to hand.

We start, then, with these two works described by Papias—Mark's Gospel and Matthew's *Logia*. Very possibly even Mark used the *Logia* as well as Peter's preaching, for where he quotes sayings of Jesus his language usually agrees more closely with that of the other synoptics than elsewhere. At all events, we can best account for the facts of the case by concluding that Matthew and Luke, at least, were both dependent on the *Logia*. We have already seen that they were also largely dependent on Mark.

As regards Matthew, our first gospel, it is enough to point to these two sources to account for the greater part of its contents. Matthew is a combination of Mark for the incidents, with the *Logia* for the teachings of Jesus.

There is still a small residue of matter that cannot be disposed of in this way. The accounts of the birth of Jesus and of the resurrection could scarcely

be in the *Logia*—they are given so differently in the two gospels of Matthew and Luke. There were other written records in existence, as we learn from Luke's prologue; but possibly the opening and closing scenes were put in from tradition.

The word "tradition," however, seems out of place when we are dealing with writings so near to the events they record as our gospels. It would be more accurate to speak of personal testimony—perhaps even the first-hand testimony of living witnesses. The narratives of the Nativity may have come from Mary, the accounts of the Resurrection from the apostles or some of their contemporaries.

Matthew's Hebrew *Logia* must have been composed for the benefit of Jewish Christians, or it would not have been written in the language of the Jews. The later work, our Matthew, though written in Greek, is more Jewish in form and references than the other synoptics.

Thus instead of the expression "the kingdom of God," which we meet with everywhere else in the New Testament, we read in Matthew, and in Matthew alone, "the kingdom of heaven." The phrases mean exactly the same, but Matthew's is more Jewish in form, the Jews shrinking from a too familiar repetition of the word "God." This gospel also

makes most frequent use of the Old Testament, appealing to prophecy and pointing out the fulfilment of it in Jesus Christ.

But to us it is of supreme value for its abundant reports of our Lord's teachings. While we have the events of the life of Jesus narrated in fullest detail in Mark, we have His teachings most copiously reported in Matthew. If, like Mary, we would sit at the feet of Jesus, let us read our Matthew.

It is difficult to say whether Matthew or Luke was written first. But it does not much matter, seeing that they were independent of one another. Both would seem to have been composed about the time of the fall of Jerusalem, probably Luke a little after that event.

In his preface St. Luke tells us how he was led to undertake his work. Others had made earlier attempts, with results that our evangelist does not seem to have thought satisfactory—apparently writing in an irresponsible way, and without seeing that they had good authority for what they said. This, we may infer—reading between the lines—from St. Luke's statement, after referring to the earlier accounts, that for his part he was collecting his materials from eye-witnesses, and tracing out the course of events "accurately from the first."

That is a very important piece of information. We cannot doubt that the evangelist wrote in good faith. The old, vulgar charges of forgery have fallen to the ground, so plainly did they reveal an utter lack of capacity to appreciate the spirit in which the gospels were written. It cannot be questioned that St. Luke is truthful in his calm, deliberate statement concerning the authorities on which he relies, and the method of his work. Then we have his word for it that his gospel is composed of carefully collected information which the writer has derived from those who were in personal contact with Jesus Christ.

Now let us take up this gospel, and examine it side by side with its two companions.

The first thing to strike a careful reader is its very attractive style. It is written in much better Greek than the other synoptics.

Possibly "the beloved physician" was a man of higher education than the other evangelists. He seems to have been a native of Macedonia, and therefore Greek would be his own language.

But the hymns which he gives in the earlier part of his work afford an exception to the style of the book, for they are the most Hebraistic writings in the New Testament, just in the form of the Old

Testament psalms. This remarkable difference in style is a clear proof that St. Luke did not compose the hymns himself or seriously alter them. This, then, is one of the signs of his great care to be accurate.

When we make our way into the body of the work, we cannot but be struck with one feature of it that has often been observed. This is emphatically the gospel of grace. The depth of grace for the greatest sinner and the width of grace for all sorts of people are here revealed with a fulness and a clearness surpassing anything elsewhere in the New Testament.

Here especially Jesus is seen as "the Friend of publicans and sinners." The outcast woman, who washed His feet with her tears, Zacchæus the publican, and the prodigal son, are found only in this gospel. So also the parable of the "Good Samaritan," and other passages that agree with this parable in showing that the favor of Christ was not confined to Jews, belong exclusively to Luke.

Another and a kindred feature of this gospel is its sympathy for the poor. If we compare the beatitudes in Luke with the better known beatitudes in Matthew, this point will come out very distinctly. Matthew has "Blessed are the poor in spirit,"

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness,” and so on, referring to persons of certain spiritual dispositions. Luke, on the other hand, has the beatitudes in a simpler and, as some think, a more primitive form—“Blessed are ye poor,” “Blessed are ye that hunger more,” and so on, followed by lamentations over the rich.

These three characteristics of the gospel—its sympathy for sinners, its sympathy for foreigners, its sympathy for the poor—impart to it at once a tenderness and a breadth that make it of peculiar value for evangelistic purposes.

One more feature of the gospel may be noted here. As a rule St. Luke gives the sayings of Christ in direct connection with the occasions out of which they arose, while in Matthew they more often appear as parts of larger discourses. This is another indication of the accuracy Luke promised in his preface. It is a hint that when the same saying is given differently by two or three evangelists it may be wise to prefer Luke’s version as the most exactly correct one—usually so, but not invariably.

The Acts of the Apostles is a sort of second volume added on to the third gospel. The prefaces of the two works are very similar; they are dedicated to the same person, Theophilus, and the preface in

the Acts refers to the gospel under the phrase, "the former treatise." Luke's characteristics are apparent again in this second work.

It falls into two parts—the first half dealing with the early apostolic Church, and the second following the travels of St. Paul, of some portions of which the writer was an eye-witness.

The work ends with the apostle's imprisonment at Rome. Why it ends there we cannot say. But if, some suppose, it was partly designed to conciliate the Roman Government, it may have gone as far as the author thought necessary to make out a good case for a favorable treatment of the Christians.

It is to be noted that St. Luke always shows the Roman Government, and the centurions in particular, in as favorable a light as possible. The horror of Rome, which appears in the Apocalypse, sprang from Nero's persecution. Before that persecution broke out Rome had been the protector of the Christians from the rage and jealousy of the Jews.

These three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all precede the fourth gospel by a considerable interval. St. John lived till the reign of Trajan, and his gospel must have been written quite late in his life, toward the end of the first century.

The Revelation was written earlier. It stands at the end of our Bible, but it was not the last book to appear.

You will scarcely expect me to attempt an explanation of this very extraordinary book, while taking a bird's-eye view of the formation of the New Testament. It may be enough to say here that whatever else it contains, in one part it predicts the destruction of Jerusalem, and in another the overthrow of the brutal power of Rome, now, after Nero's persecution, "Babylon drunk with the blood of the saints," while beyond all is the glorious triumph of Christ and His people.

The gospel is entirely different in tone. A legend concerning the origin of it, preserved by Clement of Alexandria, well illustrates the character of this work. "But John," writes Clement, "last of all perceiving that what had reference to the body in the gospel of our Saviour was sufficiently detailed, and being encouraged by his familiar friends, and urged by the Spirit, wrote a spiritual gospel."

This gospel comes last; it is supplementary to the other gospels; it is a spiritual gospel. But while spiritual in its deepest teachings, it is not the less a record of historical facts. Indeed, John is peculiarly precise in his accounts of events. He gives time

and place, day and hour, the obscure locality, with an exactness of detail not to be found in the synoptics. It is John, and John only, who mentions Bethany beyond Jordan, Ænon, and Sychar. His local coloring is very exact in all respects. References to Jewish manners are such as to reveal intimate acquaintance with them.

The gospel of John is by no means a shadowy, theological work; it is steeped in facts, and it brings us close to the events it records in its vivid presentation of them. The tendency of criticism early in the present century was to ignore this character of the gospel; but attention to it brings it out so clearly that it cannot be neglected. This is one of the happy results of the more recent criticism.

Another has been to show the essential agreement between the teachings of Jesus in John and His teachings in the synoptics. What is called the Johannine in that teaching belongs to its form rather than to its substance.

One peculiarity of this gospel, however, must not be overlooked. Its style is unique, and the manner in which it sets out the teaching of Jesus is very different from the manner of the synoptics. There He speaks in picturesque parables and crisp proverbial utterances. Here He appears in sharp contro-

versy with the Jews or making long discourses to His own disciples.

The difference of circumstances may to some extent account for this difference of style. The synoptics give us the teachings of Jesus addressed to the multitude from the boat by the seashore or on the mountain; John does not report so much of this public preaching. He supplements it by adding discussions with opponents, the private instruction of individual men and women, such as Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria, and the training of the twelve Apostles.

Though we do not meet with full parables, we have a parabolic style in John, as when Jesus calls Himself "the bread of life," "the door," "the good Shepherd."

But in the matter of style John is uniform throughout, whether he is giving discourses of Jesus, or sayings of John the Baptist, or his own comments—in all cases the peculiar, unique, Johannine style. From this significant fact we can only draw one conclusion. It must be the case that after long brooding over the story of his early days, the old man shaped it somewhat in the form of his own imagination, reporting actual events, and dependable in his statements concerning them—for the memory of

the aged is peculiarly tenacious of the experience of early days, and John shared in the promise of the Spirit, who was to bring all things to remembrance ; reporting also the actual teachings of Jesus, the very greatest teachings, the loftiest ideas of all religion ; but yet casting all in the mould of his own style.

“The letter killeth ; the Spirit giveth life.” St. John, the spiritual evangelist, introduces us most intimately to the heart and soul of the life and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. The book will always be prized for this reason as the inner shrine of all Scripture. It is as his experience deepens that the exceeding preciousness of this book grows on the Christian, and he learns more and more to draw from it the sustenance of his better thoughts.

St. John's three epistles go with the gospel ; similar in style, of the same date, breathing the same spirit, they are like a threefold echo back from the heart of the apostle of the teachings of his Lord which he has recorded in his gospel.

III

All these books of the New Testament were at first scattered works, distributed over various parts

of the Roman Empire. People who possessed one or more of them might know nothing about the others. There is reason to think that for a considerable time some of them were confined to small local groups of readers. Some were known only in the east, some only in the west.

How did the books come to be put together, recognized as Scripture, and honored as constituting a "New Testament"? This is the last question we have now to consider.

We have seen that most of the epistles were written before the gospels. They were not the first, however, to form a nucleus of the New Testament. The process began with the gospels. The first volume of the New Testament consisted of the gospels, and originally, it would seem, only of the synoptics; for, though the gospel of John was certainly written before the other gospels were grouped together in one volume, probably the use of this supplementary gospel was confined for some time to the Christians of Ephesus and the neighborhood, disciples of St. John and their descendants, who formed a sort of Johannine school.

We have seen that the earliest writer whose account of the gospels has reached us is Papias, of the middle of the second century. Papias wrote an

“Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord.” We cannot be certain as to what materials he worked with ; but there is some reason for thinking that he used our gospels.

The case becomes clearer when we arrive at Justin Martyr, who wrote about the year 150. In composing a defence of Christianity for the Roman Senate, Justin says that the Christians in their assemblies used to read “the memoirs of the Apostles which are called gospels.” He gives many extracts from these “memoirs,” all of which can be traced to one or more of our three synoptics. From certain indirect but very significant allusions we can see that he also knew John. But he does not cite the fourth gospel as of the “memoirs.” His many direct quotations are taken from the synoptics.

What are we to conclude from this? Plainly that the synoptics were read in the Christian meetings. These three gospels constitute the first volume of the New Testament—they were the New Testament of the Christians of the middle of the second century. All our New Testament was then written ; much of it was nearly a hundred years old ; but as far as we can see it appears that, as yet, only these books had been put together for use in public worship.

Justin Martyr's disciple Tatian, an Assyrian, wrote a Harmony of the four gospels. The author of *Supernatural Religion* tried to maintain that Tatian's Harmony could not have been formed out of our gospels, because the fourth gospel was too late a work to have come into the scheme. But the recent discovery of the Harmony has made it certain that it was formed from a combination of our gospels. This Harmony of Tatian's was long used in public worship by the Christians of Edessa, and elsewhere in the valley of the Euphrates. It may be read now in an English translation.

When we pursue the question how the various books of our New Testament were put together in one volume and lifted to a place of honor, even above the Old Testament, here is the answer. It was the use of the books in public worship that led to the fixing of the Canon among the Christians, just as centuries earlier it had been the use of the books of the Old Testament in the synagogue that had determined the Canon of the Jewish scriptures.

This was not done arbitrarily. Beside our four gospels there were spurious gospels and apocryphal gospels, and there was one gospel in particular that was much honored, being read in the churches of Jewish Christians, viz, the *Gospel according to the*

Hebrews. The main body of the Church declined to admit these books for public worship. The decision was not made by any council or other Church authority—not till centuries later, when the communities of Christians had already settled independently what books should receive the honor of a place in the services of the Church. This is a happy illustration of the working of the Spirit of God in the hearts of the men and women who lived in the free churches of which primitive Christendom consisted.

In the same way before long a second volume was added consisting of St. Paul's epistles. There were then two volumes known respectively as "The Gospel"—our four gospels, and "The Apostle"—St. Paul's epistles. A third volume followed consisting of the remainder of the New Testament. Sometimes the second and third parts were taken together.

All this was accomplished with the greater part of the New Testament, before the year 180; for we find Irenæus at Lyons, quoting from the epistles as well as the gospels frequently, and taking them as standards of authority. 2 Peter was later in obtaining recognition. But by the time of Irenæus the bulk of the New Testament was received as authoritative.

It was a gradual growth; and for some time there was some hesitation about books on the margin. *The Shepherd of Hermes*, *Clement of Rome's Epistle*, and the so-called *Epistle of Barnabas* are actually found in some of the very oldest MSS. of the New Testament, written at the end. But they did not obtain universal recognition, and before long they were dropped.

That this was wisely done cannot now be doubted. One of the best proofs of the inspiration of the New Testament comes from a comparison between its contents and the best writings of the early Fathers. We cannot but note a feebleness, a puerility, a diffuseness, a lack of originality in the writings of the sub-apostolic age in remarkable contrast to the spiritual and intellectual wealth and power of the New Testament books. We have in these books "the survival of the fittest," and the test they have survived is that of Christian experience.

Two facts go a long way to account for this uniqueness of the New Testament.

One is that in the gospels we have fresh transcripts from the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. All other statements about Him are of doubtful origin. Here we are at the fountain head of "the truth as it is in Jesus."

The second fact is that nearly all the New Testament was written by Apostles and men under the immediate influence of the apostles—"apostolical men" they were called. That wonderful Spirit who breathes like the wind, coming we know not how, is here, and the inspiration of His presence is felt in the New Testament even more than in the Old Testament, while He sheds on the whole Bible a "light that never shone on sea or shore."

THE END

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